

EXECUTIVE OFFICER SUMMARY REPORT
August 11, 2006

ITEM: 10

SUBJECT: **Trail Segment Projects (4) and Request for Prop 40 Funds.**
The Executive Officer will update the Board on the status of four trail segment project proposals and the Board may consider adoption of Tentative Resolutions 06-06 and 06-07. The first two Prop 40 proposals and funding requests are nearly complete and ready for submittal to the Resources Agency. The last two proposals are in early development and funding will be needed. All trail segment projects are included in the Conservancy's adopted Five Year Strategic and Infrastructure Plan (Program 2, Projects 1.1, 1.2, 1.6 East, and 1.9).

- a. **Thornbush Trail (San Diego Country Estates to Cedar Creek Falls Trail via Upper San Diego River Gorge).** Headwaters Reach with partners Cleveland National Forest and Helix Water District. A significant portion of this trail is outside Conservancy jurisdiction (Tentative Resolution 06-06).
- b. **Lakeside Trail East.** Lakeside Reach with partner Lakeside's River Park Conservancy. This trail is fully within Conservancy jurisdiction.
- c. **Lakeside Trail West.** Lakeside Reach with partner County of San Diego. This trail is fully within Conservancy jurisdiction.
- d. **Bicycle Trail Extension from Fashion Valley to Hazard Center below I-163.** Mission Valley Reach with partners City of San Diego and San Diego Bicycle Coalition. This trail is fully within Conservancy jurisdiction.

PURPOSE: Consideration and possible adoption of tentative Resolutions 06-06 and 06-07 supporting Proposition 40 grant funding for two trail projects.

DISCUSSION: **Summary of Project / Executive Officer's Recommendation**

- The first two trail project proposals are ready to submit to Resources Agency for Prop 40 funding (a) Thornbush/Cedar Creek Falls/San Diego River Gorge Trail; and (b) Lakeside Trail East.
- Tentative Resolution 06-06 -- Thornbush/Cedar Ck Falls Trail: I am recommending that the Governing Board ***adopt tentative Resolution 06-06 which approves the submittal of a grant***

application from the San Diego River Conservancy to the Resources Agency. The grant application requests Prop 40 funding for the construction and rehabilitation of a trail segment currently known by several names including the Thornbush Trail, Cedar Creek Falls Trail, and the Saddleback Trail. The proposed name is the **San Diego River Gorge Trail, East and West**. This project consists of approximately 3.75 miles of trail construction and rehabilitation in the upper San Diego River Gorge portion of the Cleveland National Forest and is estimated to cost \$91,350.

- *Tentative Resolution 06-07 Lakeside Trail East:*
I am recommending that the Governing Board *adopt tentative Resolution 06-07 which supports the submittal of a grant application from the Lakeside's River Park Conservancy to the Resources Agency.* The application requests Prop 40 funding for the development and enhancement of a segment of the greater San Diego River Trail to be known as the Lakeside's River Park Conservancy Inaugural Trail or Lakeside Trail East. This project consists of constructing approximately .75 miles of the San Diego River Trail in Lakeside and is estimated to cost approximately \$203,617.
- Partner negotiations are also underway for the last two trail projects which are in early development stages: **(c) Lakeside Trail West; and (d) Bicycle Trail Extension from Fashion Valley to Hazard Center below I-163.** Both are essential segments of the greater San Diego River Trail. Although we are not yet ready to submit Prop 40 grant applications for these segments (as I had hoped), it is nevertheless important to make the Board aware that plans are underway, progress is being made, and additional Prop 40 funding requests to the Resources Agency are forthcoming.

(a) Thornbush Trail / San Diego Country Estates to Cedar Creek Falls via San Diego River Gorge) / San Diego River Gorge Trail (Construction and Rehabilitation)

Project Lead/Gant Applicant: San Diego River Conservancy

Primary Partner: Cleveland National Forest

Trail length: 3.75 miles

Estimated Cost of Phase 1: \$91,350.

Background:

This project, suggested by the Palomar Ranger District (District) of the Cleveland National Forest, is proposed in two phases. The first phase, presented here, would be led by the Conservancy in

partnership with the District to construct and rehabilitate approximately 3.75 miles of trail to provide safer access to the San Diego River headwaters. Specifically, this trail will provide access to, and connect with, the greater San Diego River Trail from two popular areas in the headwaters, the San Diego Country Estates (in Ramona) and the Eagle Peak Preserve (near Julian). Many parts of this trail will become the San Diego River Trail.

The Palomar Ranger District asked the Conservancy to submit this San Diego River Gorge Trail (proposed new name) Phase 1 project for a Proposition 40 grant on its behalf in order to expedite the construction and rehabilitation of this high priority trail. Forest Service grant acceptance procedures are quite time consuming. Project expedience is needed due to urgent public health and safety issues as described below (see “Trail Construction Component/ Safety Issues” section). This project also will reduce erosion and environmental degradation associated with the current user-created trail on the west side of the gorge.

Mostly Outside Jurisdiction:

Because this Trail provides access to the San Diego River from both the San Diego Country Estates (on the west side of the gorge) and the Eagle Peak Preserve (on the east side of the gorge), a significant portion of the trail is outside the Conservancy’s legal jurisdiction. Approximately 1 mile of the total 3.75 miles of trail is within our jurisdiction (.5 miles on either side of thread of River). As with the White property donation, the Deputy Attorney General’s opinion¹ asserts that for projects not completely within the San Diego Area (i.e., straddlers), the decision to proceed is essentially a policy call for the Governing Board to make.

I am recommending that the Governing Board make the policy call to approve the first phase of this project (to be led by the Conservancy) for the following four reasons: (1) Completing only the portion of the trail within .5 miles on either side of the River would make no sense since trail and the River would remain inaccessible. In order to make the portion of the trail within our jurisdiction publicly accessible, the trail must continue up the sides of the gorge to the trailheads located at the top of each side of the river gorge; (2) There is an urgent need to provide safe public access to the River in the upper River Gorge area due to significant existing public health and safety issues (see below); (3) Our partner, the Palomar Ranger District of the Cleveland National Forest, has asked us to assist them in addressing the public health

¹ Attorney/Client Communication, San Diego River Conservancy: Property Acquisition Issues, September 29, 2005

and safety issues in an expeditious manner. (4) The proposed project is fully consistent with the Conservancy statutory mission and recently adopted *Five Year Strategic and Infrastructure Plan* (Program 2, Projects 1.1 and 1.2).

The proposed second phase, which will be led by the District and subject to a subsequent supporting action item by this Governing Board, will include the construction of a public bathroom and drinking fountain at the trailhead on the West side of the gorge. This phase is still undergoing design and environmental approvals and is thus not ready to submit for consideration.

Trail Construction Component / Safety Issues:

This project will construct approximately 1.75 miles of new trail descending 925 feet from the San Diego Country Estates in Ramona on the Western side of the San Diego River Gorge to the bottom of the river gorge. The existing informal trail is called the San Diego River Trail, Thornbush Trail, or sometimes the Cedar Creek Falls Trail. The proposed name for the new and improved trail is the San Diego River Gorge Trail *West*). The current trail, which is user created, is approximately 1.25 miles from the gorge top to the river as the hawk flies. This very popular trail is often used by visitors to access nearby Cedar Creek Falls.

Because the trail evolved from visitor use and was not deliberately engineered, it is out-of-grade, improperly located and is not associated with any visitor amenities. Given the steepness of the terrain, the semi-remote location and the high level of use, this has caused numerous safety, environmental and health-related problems, including extreme user exhaustion (often requiring assistance from ASTREA - the air support unit of the San Diego Sheriff's Department), and unacceptable levels of erosion and human fecal contamination. For all of these reasons, this is the highest priority trail construction project at this time for the Cleveland National Forest and the District.

This project will involve the use of mechanized equipment to fully construct and refine the trail to make it easier and safer for visitors to reach the river. The District has already begun the project including defining the new route and lightly roughing out portions with hand crews. The District has also completed the environmental reviews required for the trail construction.

In addition the Palomar Ranger District has reached a verbal agreement with the Helix Water District, which owns part of the land traversed by the trail at the bottom of the gorge, to perfect legal access. Helix Water District has indicated its intent to sign

the agreement upon receipt formalizing the easement.
Construction will only occur on Forest Service-owned land.

The proposed new trail alignment improves an old truck trail and parts of the main user-created social trail with design and structural features to mitigate erosion and steepness of grade. Switchbacks, climbing turns, and rock-armored drainage dips would be constructed using a contracted mini-excavator, contracted work crews, and volunteer labor.

The project would also create a small paved area (adding two parking spaces for a total of ten spaces) for additional designated parking at the informal trailhead. The added parking next to the trailhead is important to the project since it will offer visitors the convenience of parking closer to the trail and away from nearby residences.

Trail Rehabilitation Component:

The two mile portion of the trail from the eastern boundary of Helix Water District property which ascends from the bottom up the eastern side of the gorge leads to an informal trailhead, now known as Saddleback and proposed to be called the San Diego River Gorge Trail *East*. This eastern portion of the trail segment will require only minor rehabilitation and spot-tread restructuring and will utilize the same contracted excavator equipment used for the Western portion of the trail.

Shared Roles and Responsibilities:

For Phase 1, the Conservancy will work closely with the District in defining a competitive bid process that meets both Federal and State requirements. Working with the Conservancy, the District will participate in the choice of the contractors and provide on-the-ground supervision of the work and assist with oversight of project administration. The District will also finalize the easement with the Helix Water District.

For Phase 2, the District will take the lead as the proposed bathroom and water fountain improvements will take additional time to design and permit, allowing time for internal Forest Service grant approval processes to be completed.

(b) Lakeside Trail East (San Diego River Trail in Lakeside)

Project Lead/Gant Applicant: Lakeside's River Park Conservancy

Primary Partner: San Diego River Conservancy

Trail length: .75 miles

Estimated Cost: \$203,617

This project will develop and enhance approximately .75 miles of trail as part of the greater San Diego River Trail. The project will provide the first segment of the San Diego River trail in Lakeside, hence its other name, Lakeside's Inaugural Trail Segment.

Background:

Lakeside's River Park Conservancy (Lakeside Conservancy) owns approximately 100 acres of land along the San Diego River in Lakeside. This property is currently the site of a large habitat restoration project being implemented by the Lakeside Conservancy. The property was purchased by the Lakeside Conservancy, partially with Prop 40 funds, in 2004.

While the 100 acres are being restored primarily as habitat, the restoration project is designed to incorporate a trail which will become part of the greater San Diego River Trail through Lakeside. The creation of that trail is the subject of this Prop 40 grant application, which is now ready for submittal to the Resources Agency.

The property is a former sand mining site and contains an unpaved haul road. This road is located on the North side of the property and is designated in the San Diego County Trails Master Plan as a major spine in the county trails network along the river. The grant will support bringing the haul road up to county trail standards including the addition of a split rail fence, four inches of decomposed granite and a native plant border.

The trail will provide access to the river from Channel Road in the east and will border the Hanson Aggregate site. Hanson Aggregate will begin mining that site shortly; when the mining is completed, that property will be dedicated to Lakeside's River Park and will become home to picnic areas, a nature and cultural center as well as an equestrian staging area.

During the sand mining phase, the trail will be separated from the site by a chain link fence. The Lakeside Conservancy will hang plywood on the fence to act as a visual barrier and then ask youth groups to design and paint murals on the plywood depicting the river park. This will serve to both advertise the new trail and tell the story of the river.

At the west end of the Lakeside Conservancy property, the trail will eventually connect to another proposed trail segment to be built on an adjacent owners' property. That connection is described briefly section c. of this report.

Shared Roles and Responsibilities:

The Lakeside Conservancy is the lead for this important River Trail segment. The San Diego River Conservancy however, working with its partners including the Lakeside Conservancy, is exploring the possibility of using a programmatic approach to permitting the entire San Diego River Trail or significant segments of trail. For this purpose we have initiated a series of meetings with the State Department of Fish and Game and the US Wildlife Service.

While the Lakeside Conservancy's portion of the trail was permitted as part of the approval of its restoration plan, the experience it gains through the implementation of this trail on its own property will be extremely helpful to the greater San Diego River Trail project as other trail segments are planned and implemented. Accordingly, the conservancies will continue to closely coordinate on trail issues.

(c) Lakeside Trail West and (d) Bicycle Trail Extension from Fashion Valley to Hazard Center below I-163.***Background:***

The Conservancy has been working closely with its non-profit partners as well as the City of San Diego, the County of San Diego and the City of Santee, to develop trail projects consistent with the *Five Year Strategic and Infrastructure Plan* and suitable for Proposition 40 and other funding opportunities.

Especially critical trail connections are needed (1) in the City of San Diego under the Highway 163 bridge; (2) between Mission Trails Regional Park and the City of Santee; (3) in the County between the Santee border (to the west) and the Lakeside Conservancy's property and proposed trail (to the east) and; (4) in Santee under Mast Blvd and across the Carlton Oaks Golf Course.

Although none of these trail connection projects are simple, the Conservancy and partners continue to advance each of them and progress is incrementally being made. Grant applications for Prop 40 funding however, are not yet ready for submittal to the Resources Agency.

Lakeside Trail West

The Conservancy has been working with the Lakeside Conservancy and County of San Diego to provide a connection between the Lakeside Trail East (on the Lakeside Conservancy property) and the Santee border to the west. The proposed segment is currently referred to as Lakeside Trail West.

Bicycle Trail Extension from Fashion Valley to Hazard Center below I-163.

In the case of the connection under Highway 163, the City of San Diego has opened a project work order and is refining the scope of work. The City has received partial funding for this project, enough to get it to a thirty percent design phase. In addition the San Diego Bicycle Coalition has been successful in obtaining substantial federal funding for the project. The Conservancy's proposed role will be to cover the remaining shortfall, currently estimated at \$800,000. Because the City is proposing a construction date of fiscal 2009 for this project, both the Conservancy and the San Diego Bicycle Coalition are working to encourage the City to advance the schedule.

LEGAL CONCERNS: None.

FISCAL IMPACT: A five percent charge to cover the Conservancy's administrative expenses will be incorporated into Prop 40 grant for the San Diego River Gorge Trail.

SUPPORTING
DOCUMENTS:

1. Tentative Resolution 06-06
2. Tentative Resolution 06-07
3. Also see Item 7, Supporting Document 3 **"SDRC Trail Segment Projects" Map** for location of trail segment projects discussed in this item.

RECOMMENDATION: Adopt Tentative Resolutions 06-06 and 06-07.